



# Colposcopy

A colposcopy is a procedure where your cervix, vagina or vulva are examined under magnification with a colposcope. A colposcope is a magnifying instrument within a light source and looks similar to a pair of binoculars. The colposcope does not touch you or go inside you. It allows the health professional to see any abnormalities.

## Why do I need a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is recommended:

- if you have had abnormal cervical screening tests (previously known as a pap smear)
- to review changes on your cervix, vagina or vulva
- if you have certain symptoms like abnormal vaginal bleeding.

## How long will my colposcopy take?

The actual colposcopy typically takes 5-10 minutes, with the whole appointment usually lasting about 30 minutes. You may also have to wait before being seen.

## How do I get ready for my colposcopy?

Before your appointment, do not put any creams or pessaries inside your vagina. It is best if you are NOT menstruating when you have your colposcopy. If possible, you should try to make your appointment when you think you will not be having your period. Before the procedure begins, tell the staff what they can do to support you if you have concerns.

## What happens during the procedure?

1. Before the colposcopy starts, a speculum will be inserted into your vagina. A speculum is a device used to hold the walls of your vagina apart so that your cervix and vagina can be seen.
2. Your cervix will then be examined using the colposcope. The doctor will dab your cervix with acetic acid (a vinegar-like solution) or an iodine solution to help them see any abnormal cells more clearly. Any abnormal cells will show up as a different colour.
3. The doctor may decide to do a biopsy during the colposcopy and will talk with you about this at the time. A biopsy involves taking a small sample of tissue for testing to give more information on any changes in your cells. This tissue will be sent to the laboratory and examined under a microscope.
4. The speculum will be removed, and the examination is complete.

## Is colposcopy a painful procedure?

The procedure may cause some discomfort but should not be painful. A small number of people experience a slight tingling sensation when the acetic acid is applied to the cervix. Some people have mild cramping if a biopsy is taken. This settles quickly.

## What should I do after my colposcopy?

1. Most people will be able to return to regular activities straight away after having a colposcopy. Some people have mild pain or cramping, but this usually settles within 1-2 hours.
2. If you have a biopsy of your cervix, you may have a small amount of vaginal bleeding after the procedure. A brownish or dark discharge is normal for the first few days.
3. Do not put anything in your vagina (creams, douches, tampons) and do not have vaginal sex for 7 days after having a biopsy.

See your healthcare provider if you have:

- heavy vaginal bleeding (soaking pads within 1-2 hours)
- vaginal bleeding for more than 7 days
- unpleasant smelling vaginal discharge
- pelvic pain or cramping that continues more than a few days
- fevers (temperature above 38°C) or chills

## When will the results of my colposcopy be available?

The results of your colposcopy will be available from the clinic where you have had the procedure. We will tell you how to get these results at the time of your colposcopy. The clinic will also tell you about any other follow up care you may need.

### References

Feltmate, C. and Feldman, S. (2019). *UpToDate Patient Information: Colposcopy (Beyond the Basics)*  
<http://www.uptodate.com/contents/colposcopy-beyond-the-basics>

Medline Plus (2020) *Colposcopy Directed Biopsy*  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003913.htm>

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